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SUBJECT: RESPONSE TO DIPNOTE ON SALAS BECKER PROTOCOL

REF: PANAMA 417

¶1. (SBU) Summary and Action Request. This cable provides guidance, as requested in reftel, for Embassy Panama to respond to Diplomatic Note 231/09 from the Panamanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). Please deliver the following response to the MFA.

¶2. (SBU) Begin text:

The Department of State presents its compliments to the Ministry of Foreign Relations of the Republic of Panama, Directorate General of Legal Affairs and Treaties and has the honor to refer to the enforcement of the Salas-Becker Agreement, which was the subject of the Ministry's Note No. 1156 of May 8, 2009.

The Salas-Becker Agreement is of vital importance to combating illicit traffic by sea and air in narcotics and other offenses. The United States of America highly values the Salas-Becker Agreement and the continued partnership with Panama under the Agreement to interdict and deliver appropriate legal consequences to vessels and persons engaged in illicit activity.

The Department of State wishes to express its regret for the complications and inadequate communications relating to the U.S. Coast Guard's boarding of Panamanian-flagged vessel POLLUX A during the period of April 26-30, 2009.

The Department of State acknowledges the importance of adhering to Article XIV of the Agreement and the standard operating procedures drafted during the meetings held in Panama City in December 2008. The standardized procedures and associated forms were developed jointly to ensure that the necessary channels of communication are established and functional between the designated officials of our Governments.

The Department of State will work with other U.S. Government agencies to ensure proper implementation of the Agreement and standardized procedures and that the Operations Center of the National Aero-Naval Service of Panama (SENAV) is updated on the status of authorized boardings via telephone, fax, or email communications at least every six (6) hours.

The Department of States avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Ministry of Foreign Relations of the Republic of Panama, Directorate General of Legal Affairs and Treaties the assurances of its highest consideration.

End Text.  
CLINTON